

AN ANALYSIS OF GRAMMATICAL TENSES IN ROSÉ'S "TOXIC TILL THE END" LYRICS

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Info Artikel	Abstract
Artikel Masuk: 15 Januari 2026 Artikel Review: 21 Januari 2026 Artikel Revisi: 26 Januari 2026	In formal media, learning tenses in frequently seen as inflexible. The purpose of this study is to examine how grammatical tenses are used in non-formal media, specially in the lyrics of Rosé's song 'toxic till the end'. This study, which used a qualitative descriptive methode, discovered that the most common form used to describe the conflict's history in the narrative flow is past tense. Characters and present emotional awareness are described in the present tense, whereas future action plans are represented in the future tense. According to the study's findings, the theme of the song which are manipulation and self-assertion are communicated through the use of shifting tenses. This study demonstrates that song lyrics can be a useful tool for comprehending the practical uses of grammar. In order to better understand character potrayal in the lyrics, it is adviced that future research examine how adjectives are used.
Kata Kunci: Grammatical Tenses; Song Lyrics; Rosé; Language Analysis	

Introduction

Language is essential for communication and it cannot be separated from human being. We use language as a media in interacting with others. In this context, music can be the alternative way to convey language, as it allows emotions and messages to be delivered through lyrics. In linguistics, the study of the sentence is familiar with syntax. Syntax is the relationship among words, phrases, and clauses based on grammatical rules, which means it is the set of principles according to which words are combined into sentence in language (Purwata, 2008). In short, syntax means of how words are combined and structured to make a sentence (Alamgeer et al., 2022). One of the most important of syntax is about the grammatical structure especially the tenses. In English language teaching, tenses benefit learners to achieve a good communication skills. Tenses are related to time, they can be present, past, and future. Present tense is a verb form used to talk about things related to the present time and shows the English way of expressing that a situation has something to do with the present (Declerck et al., 2006). Apart from that, (Michaelis, 2021) stated that the present tense can provide certainty about time when we speak and with the aim of stating facts, habits or actions that are currently taking place. However if the present tense functions to show current facts or things that are currently taking place, the past tense according to (Riddle, 1986) perspective is indicates an event with a time that has passed, but it does not merely show the time that has passed, but rather functions as a tool to background information that is considered no longer to have direct relevance to the moment of speaking. Another opinion says that past tense is a way of changing the form of a basic word into a past word and devides it into two types of

formation, namely regular with the simple suffix -ed and irregular with a change in sound (Albright & Hayes, 2001). Adding that, the past tense has several functions, namely to express events that have been completed, to build a story so that it is in sequence, and to clarify the time context, so that mastering the past tense is considered very important for smooth communication (Lubis et al., 2025). Besides the past tense being important to understand, the future form is also equally important. Lubis et al., (2025) also said this describes an action that has not yet occurred, but is expected to occur in the future. The function of this tense is not much different, it is the same, to arrange sentences so that they are structured and to train fluency, then to state plans using will and be going to, and finally to make predictions such as explained by (Sarkar, 1998). Types of tenses based on Ferikoğlu, (1995) listed in (Stephens & Sanderson, 2021), there are sixteen types of tenses namely: Simple present tense, present continuous, present perfect tense, present perfect continuous tense, simple past tense, past continuous tense, past perfect tense, past perfect continuous tense, simple future tense, future continuous tense, future perfect tense, future perfect continuous tense, simple future past tense, future continuous past tense, future perfect past tense, and future perfect continuous past tense.

In this study, syntax involves arranging how verbs change their forms according to time to create grammatically complete and meaningful sentences. Tenses are mandatory to learn because it can help convey something when communicating correctly without misunderstanding. Apart from helping with communication, tenses also have a very important role in writing. In this case, for understanding in learning English, tenses need to be studied and emphasized continuously. Of course, teaching requires an interesting method to make it easier to understand, such as music in a song for example (Fatmawati, 2023).

According to (Intan, 2012) as cited in (Karlina et al., 2017), songs, especially the lyrics can be a learning tool for learners to achieve their language goals easily. Song lyrics help teachers and students learn language features by analyzing the sentences in the lyrics, for example by analyzing the tenses used. Based on (Bokiev, 2018) as contained in (Panduwati & Hilman, 2025) analyzing song lyrics has many lessons, one of which is to express style in order to achieve certain goals. Fatmawati, 2023 also said that the English learning process can be enhanced by songs. Songs can be a medium for learning English in a fun way, making the class more lively, and stimulating student activity so that the process of absorbing second language knowledge can be accepted easily if they like or enjoy it. Many learners face difficulties in applying tenses functionally, such as confusion about the use of the Simple Present and Present Continuous in permanent situations (Ali et al., 2021). This is exacerbated by the complexity of tenses structures, which often feel abstract to non-native learners. Therefore, effective teaching requires student-centered strategies, such as contextual learning to overcome these obstacles and improve students' communication skills (Bektudiryeva & Bekimbetova, 2025). In this regard, the use of Rosé's song lyrics can be a contextual learning strategy that helps students understand the application of tenses in a concrete and engaging way.

The song taken in this research is a song by Rosé, with the title ‘toxic till the end’. “Toxic till the end” by Rosé was released on December, 6, 2024. It is one of Rosé’s solo songs and this song is the title track from her album called “rosie”. Rosé is one of the members of the famous girlgroup Blackpink. Her album ‘rosie’ consists of 12 other songs. This song is an emotional emo pop/punk-rock genre. On the YouTube platform, from its first release until now the “toxic till the end” music video has been watched by 121 million viewers. This song also became a hit by climbing the Billboard Hot 100, Billboard Global 200 & Excl. US, the local chart, platform streaming, and so on. This song describes a manipulative, possessive, jealous relationship, as well as the struggle to let go or explain Rosé’s relationship with her ex. Rosé’s song “toxic till the end” was chosen as a case study for this linguistic analysis. The focus is on the grammatical tenses used in the lyrics, exploring how these temporal structures help listeners navigate the complex timeline of the story being told. This song is a very interesting tool for learning tenses because the lyrics include variations in time that are closely related to tenses.

Although the challenges of tenses have been widely discussed, the focus of previous research has been on the formal realm. The scientific novelty of this study lies in the use of popular song lyrics as an instrument to overcome the difficulties. Based on these problems, this study aims to analyze the use of tenses and the functions in the lyrics of the song ‘toxic till the end’ by Rosé in order to provide a more contextual and easy-to-understand understanding of grammar for learners. This exemplifies how learning tenses can be done through fun activity such as enjoyable songs, speeding up the learning process if students and teachers maintain a non-monotonous classroom environment.

Research Method

The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive method, to analyze the types and functions of tenses is Rosé’s song ‘toxic till the end’ lyrics. The choice of the song in this research using the purposive sampling. As explained by (Joshi & Banjara, 2004) as cited in (Rai & Thapa, 2017), purposive sampling is a method in which researchers select samples based on personal judgement to ensure that the units selected align with the research objectives. This technique is particularly suitable for studies requiring in-depth information, because it allows researchers to focus on information-rich cases. The criteria were: (1) The song lyrics have a complex chronological narrative; (2) There are various contrasting tenses to describe emotional changes; and (3) The song represents a linguistic phenomenon in popular culture. This approach was chosen to present a comprehensive summary of the phenomenon of language use in real-world contexts without falsifying the data (Furidha, 2023). As explained by (Sandelowski, 2000), this method allows researchers to stay close to the data in the form of existing lyric data and present it in easy language and without requiring an abstract theoretical framework.

Result and Discussion

Result

These results will answer what tenses are contained in the lyrics as well as their function in accordance with the stated objectives.

'Toxic Till The End'

ROSÉ

*Call us what we are
Toxic from the start
Can't pretend that I was in the dark
When you met my firends
Didn't even try with them
I should've known right then that you were*

*Jealous and possesive
So manipulatin'
Honestly impressive
You had me participatin'*

*Back then
When I was runnin' out of your place I said
"I never wanna see your face"
I meant I couldn't wait to see you again
We were 'toxic till the end*

*Uh huh
'Cause even when I said it was over
You heard, "Baby can you pull me in closer?"
You were
Plottin' how to stay in my head
We were 'toxic till the end*

*Ladies & Gentleman
I present to you, the ex*

*His favorite game is chess
Who would ever guess
Playing with the pieces in my chest
Now he's on the screen and
Saying don't leave
You stole that line from me
'Cause you're just
Jealous and possesive
So manipulatin'*

*Honestly impressive
You had me participatin'

Back then
When I was runnin' out of your place I said,
"I never wanna see your face"
I meant I couldn't wait to see you again
We were toxic 'till the end*

*Uh huh
'Cause even when I said it was over
You heard "Baby can you pull me in closer?"
You were
Plottin' how to stay in my head
We were toxic till the end
End end*

*I can forgive you for a lot of things
For not giving me back my Tiffany rings
I'll never forgive you for one thing my dear
You wasted my prettiest years*

*Back then
When I was running out of your place I said
"I never wanna see your face"
I meant
I couldn't wait to see you again
We were toxic*

*Uh huh
'Cause even when I said it was over
You heard Baby can you pull me in closer
You were
Plottin' how to stay in my head
We were toxic till the end
End end
We were toxic till the end
End end*

Based on an analysis of the lyrics of the song, various tenses were found to describe the subject's emotional journey. These findings were classified into three main groups of tenses: Past tense, Present tense, and Future tense.

1. Past Tense

This tense or this verb form is the verb form frequently found in the lyrics of Rosé's song 'toxic till the end'. Several past tense verb forms are found here including:

1) Simple Past Tense

This tense is used to tell facts that happened and finished in the past and also shows the main events that form the storyline. This form is found in stanzas 1 and 3, as in the lyrics: (1) "I was in the dark" in Stanza 1. Here the subject (**I**) + to be (**was**) is used. "**Was**" is used because the subject is singular and the event is past; (2) "When you met my friends" in Stanza 1. It is very clear here that the use of "**met**", which is the past tense of the verb "**meet**", indicates the simple past tense. This clause indicates a specific event that occurred at a certain time and has been completed; (3) "Didn't even try with them" in Stanza 1. Using past negative forms (**did not**) and "**try**"; (4) "I said, 'I never wanna see your face'" in Stanza 3. Uses the verb "**said**" (V2 form of **say**) in functionally this line tells us the tenses is used to document a verbal action that occurred in the past; (5) "I meant, I couldn't wait to see you again". Uses the verb "**meant**" (V2 form of **mean**); (6) "You stole that line from me" in Stanza 6. Using "**stole**" (V2 form of **steal**), indicates the fact that the act of emotional plagiarism has occurred in the past; (7) "We were toxic 'till the end" in Stanza 3, 4, and 7, to be "**were**" is used because the subject is plural and the relationship is in the past; (8) "You wasted my prettiest years" in Stanza 10. The word "**wasted**" is the past form from the verb "**waste**", so this shows past events that have already happened.

2) Past Continuous Tense

Past continuous has the main function of describing the action that is taking place when another event occurs. In the lyrics "When I was runnin' out of your place" in Stanza 3 and "You were plottin' how to stay in my head" in Stanza 4. Using "**was runnin'** and **were plottin'**" depicts an action that is taking place in the midst of other past events.

3) Past Modal

In past modals, the focus is not on the tense of when it happened but, rather on the response to the event. The lyric "I couldn't wait to see you again" in Stanza 3, there's a modal of ability in negative, uses the word "**couldn't**" past form of "**can't**" and "I should've known right then", using the modal perfect pattern (Should + have + V3) as a form of evaluation for the past.

2. Present Tense

This category is found in the transitions and character descriptions that are considered facts when the song is sung.

1) Simple Present Tense

This tenses is used to tell the general truth, habits, or situations that are

happening at the moment. This form is found in Stanza 1, 2, 5, 6, & 10 as in the lyrics. (1) "Call us what we are" in Stanza 1. The word "**call**" shows the imperative and "**what we are**" is the present, the use of *to be* "**are**" indicates a current status or identity; (2) "I present to you, the ex" in Stanza 5. Using the verb "**present**" (V1) as a performative action; (3) "His favorite game is chess" (Stanza 6), using *to be* "**is**" to indicate a current, actual situation; (4) "Cause you're just jealous and possessive" (Stanza 2 & 6), also using *to be* "**are**" to label a character that is permanent; (5) "I can forgive you..." and "For not giving me back my Tiffany rings" in Stanza 10 or the bridge part. The first line shows the use of modal "**can**" the verb 1 "**forgive**" and the second line using gerund or Verb-ing "**giving**" as a noun; also in the intro (6) "Can't pretend that I was in the dark", the word "**can**" is a modal that shows the **ability**. By adding **not**, the subject or Rosé expresses an **inability** to lie again in the present tense. "**Pretend**" is the base verb that follows the **modal**.

2) Present Continuous

This tense stating a situation that is currently happening and is temporary. The lyrics: (1) "Now he's on the screen and saying don't leave" in Stanza 6, show the actual situation. Actually, the "**he's on the screen**" is a simple present, but the word "**now**" has changed it into present continuous, because the word "**now**" shows a strong signal for something that is happening right at the moment it is being spoken (at the moment of speaking). Also the use of "**saying**" which is it is a present participles of "**say**" is connected with the word "**he's**" in front. So, because he is performing an action (speaking/ saying "don't leave") on the screen, this entire series of sentences is categorized as present continuous; (2) "Playing with the pieces in my chest" in stanza 6 or verse 2. The use of word "**playing**" or the **-ing** form of "**play**" here describe an activity that is being or is being carried out continuously.

3. Future Tense

Future tense is a verb form used to indicate events that have not yet occurred or that will occur in the future. Only one type of future tense is found in this lyric.

1) Simple Future

It has been found to express intentions, promises, or decisions that apply to the future. (1) In the Stanza 10 "I'll never forgive you for one thing my dear". This line has the structure of simple future tense (Subject + Will + never + V1). Subject "**I**" and the future form "**will**"; (2) In Stanza 3, 8, & 11 or the chorus part, "I never wanna see your face" the main verb is **want** + to, this line shows plans for the future.

Discussion

Based on the results found, it can be seen that the tenses used in the lyrics of 'toxic till the end' are predominantly past tense. However, the song doesn't just use past tense; it also uses other tense, such as present and future tense. Some even use modals and don't

focus solely on verbs. So, this song is very varied and interesting to analyze. Let's explain why we use this tense, its function, and what its correlation is to the narrative in the song.

1. Past Tense

This tense analysis is based on the theory put forward by Riddle (1996), Michaelis (2021), and Lubis, et.al (2025) which will explain the meaning of the lyrics found in the results section.

1) Simple Past Tense Analysis

In the lyrics: (1) "I was in the dark" in Stanza 1. Using the past nominal "was" here is to provide facts or an event that has finished in the past. Also there's phrase "in the dark" in metaphorically means not know anything. The past tense used here emphasizes that the state of "not knowing" was the subject's actual state in the past before they realized the full truth. So it established a narrative "starting point" where the subject is still in a state of naivety before the conflict occurs, based on Riddle's theory stating that there a distance where "before I was stupid, but now I am aware". (2) "When you met my friends" the verb "met" indicates the completed actions and this indicates a meeting point that becomes an important memory in the song, where this indicates the beginning of a conflict in the relationship or indicates a bad interaction between '*the male*' and '*the subject friends*' based on Riddle's (1986) and Lubis, et al (2025) theory. (3) "Didn't even try with them" this line shows the failure of '*the male*' in maintaining a good relationship with the subject's friends. Where the man makes her distant from her social environment, so it can be said that this relationship is a toxic relationship which describes the content of the song. (4) "I said, I never wanna see your face" in this lyric the "I said" clause functions as a verbal action in the past. Based on Lubis, et.al (2025) theory, this shows a chronological sequence that the subject once wanted to end or limit the relationship. However, in Riddle's (1986) theory, the use of this tense provides a psychological distance that shows a disparity between the intended meaning and the subject's feelings, which are further explained in the following lyrics. Also this shows a moment when the subject was confused about being in a toxic relationship. (5) "I meant, I couldn't wait to see you again" this lyric depicts an attitude of denial. If it is linked to the previous lyrics "I said, I never wanna see your face", it very clearly describes this. The subject says she doesn't want to meet him or '*the male*' but her feelings say the opposite, as if she is trapped in the relationship. So, the use of simple past tense in the words "meant" and "couldn't" according to Riddle theory, it function to show an evaluation of contradictory past mental conditions. Also supported by the theory of Lubis et al. That past can clarify the narrative to listener, such as 'toxic' traits that occur due to disharmony in the subject's feelings. (6) "We were toxic till the end", it serves to label their past relationship as toxic and means that the subject has moved on from the relationship they were in. (7) the last one "You wasted my prettiest years". "Wasted" here to tells us that this relationship has had a negative impact on the subjec's life, such as wasting the subject's valuable time,

thus causing regret.

2) Past Continuous Analysis

There are two lines in two stanzas to analyze regarding the past continuous here: "When I was runnin' out of your place" and "You were plottin' how to stay in my head" provide a detailed and in-depth impression of ongoing event over other events or by providing background to bring the chronology of events to life. In Michaelis (2021) perspective the words "runnin'" and "plottin'" emphasizing ongoing activities, so this is escalating the theme toxic relationship traps involving physical and mental aspects.

3) Past Modal

"I couldn't wait to see you again" and "I should've known right then", these two lyrics show additional information regarding the subject's past mistakes while in a relationship and shows understanding to make the past a valuable lesson by realizing things that will interfere with the relationship. So, the past modals here is not just a time marker but also a way to convey emotional expressions related to failure in making decisions.

2. Present Tense

In contrast to the dominance of the past in the early verses, the use of present tense in this song provides a dimension of current truth. The analysis will use the basis of Declerck (2006), Michaelis (2021), and also Lubis, et al. (2025).

1) Simple Present Analysis

Based on the result, this form is found in Stanza 1, 2, 5, 6, & 10 as in the lyrics: (1) "Call us what we are" this line revealing the fact that the relationship is toxic and it is very interesting that this lyrics seem to be a way out of the summary of events in the past tense. As if admitting that the relationship deserves to be called toxic. (2) "I present to you, the ex", this lyrics function as action verb or according to Declerck (2006) this is included in the '*performative category*' by providing very straightforward information. Based on Lubis, et al. (2025) for clarity information, so it can be concluded that the use of this tense communicatively is very important to know the newness of the information for the listener because it contains the 'present' that now the relationship has ended. (3) "His favorite game is chess", according to these three theories, the use of to be is not just to express his hobby playing chess. This could also suggest that '*the male's*' nature is like a chess player itself, full of strategy, cunning, and a tendency to control relationships. So, the subject provides the listener with facts about why '*the male*' was so evil in the past because he considered his life a game of chess. So, there's a valid reason why all the bad things in the past happened. (4) "You're just jealous and possessive", explaining that the male's true nature is jealousy and possessiveness, this could explain how their relationship become toxic. Or answering question, "Why did our relationship fall apart? Because of your true nature is jealousy and possessiveness." The present tense here makes the reason

seem valid. (5) “I can forgive you for a lot of things” and “For not giving me back my Tiffany rings”. The subject says or use the word “can” to indicate her current capacity. This is a current reality according to Declerck. Even though the male hurt the subject, the subject feels strong to forgive small things, this demonstrate the subject’s maturity. Based on Lubis, et al. (2025) this is serve to provide clear information about ‘tolerance limits. The subject wants the listener to kniw that she is not vengeful person when it comes to material things. (6) “Can’t pretend that I was in the dark”. The modal ‘can’ in negative form so its become “can’t”. According to Lubis, et al. (2025) the point is to combine the past and present. Here she expresse her awareness of her past relationship.

2) Present Continuous Analysis

“Now he’s on the screen and saying don’t leave” in Stanza 6, here is the first line. After venting about the past the subject wants to bring us back to the present. She wants to listener to know where ‘the male’ is now and this provides a very clear picture of the difference situation between the past and present. (2) “Playing with the pieces in my chest”, shows the negative impact is so noticeable and leaves pain as a result of the love game played by the man. Michaelis (2021) giving the opinion thst it seems as if the verb-ing is an action that is not finished and continuers, thus concluding that the subject’s pain is still felt.

3. Future Tense

To analyze these lyrics, here we use the theoretical basis from Sarkar (1998) and Lubis, et al. (2025). Lyrics containing future tense have been found, namely as follows:

1) Simple Future Tense

In the lyrics: “I’ll never forgive you for one thing my dear” and “I never wanna see your face”. Sakrar argues that the word will (or in abbreviation ‘ll) in English often functions as a modality of intention. In the first lyric, the subject makes a promise to herself, has made a determination not to meet again or forgive a toxic person which is ‘the male’. Lubis, et al. (2025) added that this tense functions to make decisions in order to understand what will happen next. The second lyric, the word “never” related to desire to the future. So, the meaning of ‘never’ itself is a subject’s decisions to cut off ‘the ex’ or ‘the male’ forever and this way of resolving the story contained in the song ‘toxic till the end’.

Conclusion

In summary, the grammatical tense analysis of the lyrics of ‘toxic till the end’, presents various uses of tenses to build the story contained in the song. It can be seen that the tenses used in the lyrics of ‘toxic till the end’ are predominantly past tense. However, the song doesn’t just use past tense; it also uses other tense, such as present and future tense. The past tense here serves as the narrative backdrop for a conflict that occurred in the past. The present tense is then used to explain the ‘toxic’ partner’s character and current feelings. Finally, the future tense is used to inform decisions or plans for the future.

Overall, the transition from past memories to present realizations, and ending with future commitments, describes a person's journey chronologically to escape from toxic relationship. This proves that the choice of this song is not just a grammatical formality, but can also be a medium to convey a story within it, so that we can understand the song and or in any work in depth. For further research, it is recommended to focus on analyzing the adjectives contained in the lyrics. This will build and strengthen character and add deeper meaning to the toxic relationship.

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